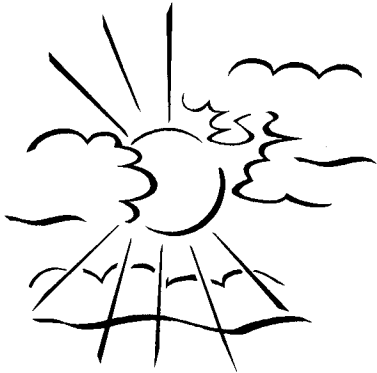


***Department  
of  
Human  
Services***

Prepared by the  
DHS Office of  
Communications  
(517) 373-7394



\*Important story at this spot

# **Articles in Today's Clips**

## **Thursday, March 9, 2006**

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

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**BOB HERBERT**

# Children In Torment

Two little boys — toddlers in Yonkers — died horrible deaths last July when they were left alone in a bathroom with scalding water running in the tub. The water overflowed and flooded the room. The children, in agony, were unable to escape as the water burned and blistered their feet and ankles and kept on rising. One of the boys struggled to save himself by standing on his toes, but to no avail.

Authorities said that when the boys were found, they were lying face up in the water on the bathroom floor, their bodies all but completely scorched. They had burned to death.

The boys — one was nearly three years old and the other 20 months — had been left in the bathroom (which had a damaged door that was difficult to open) by David Maldonado, the live-in boyfriend of the boys' mother. Police said he was the father of one of the children.

The two adults had taken heroin. While the children suffered and died, the grown-ups, according to the authorities, were lying in bed, lost in a deep drug-fueled sleep. Both have pleaded guilty in connection with the deaths, and have been imprisoned.

I've been reading (and sometimes writing) stories like this for many years. Every few months or so, some horrifying child abuse case elbows its way onto the front pages, and there is a general outcry: How could this have happened? Where were the caseworkers? Lock up the monsters who did this! Let's investigate and reform the child welfare system.

And then the story subsides and we behave as if this murderous abuse of helpless children trapped in the torture chambers of their own homes has somehow subsided with it. But child

abuse is a hideous, widespread and chronic problem across the country. And despite the sensational cases that periodically grab the headlines, it doesn't get nearly enough attention.

What some adults do to the children in their care can seem like behavior left over from the Inquisition. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, nearly 1,500 children died from abuse or neglect in 2003, the latest year for which reasonably reliable statistics are available. That's four children every day, and that estimate is probably low. Record-keeping in some states is notoriously haphazard.

Authorities in Michigan reported the heartbreaking case of a 7-year-old, Ricky Holland, who begged his school nurse not to send him home to his adoptive parents. "Let me stay in school," he pleaded.

He was later beaten to death with a hammer, prosecutors said, and his bloody body was dragged away in a garbage bag. His parents were charged with his death.

The deaths, as horrible as they are, don't begin to convey the enormity of the problem. In 2003, authorities were alerted to nearly three million cases of youngsters who were alleged to have been abused or neglected, and confirmed a million of them. The number of cases that never come to light is, of course, anybody's guess.

What's remarkable to me is that we've been hearing about this enormously tragic problem for so long, decades, and yet the reaction to each sickening case that makes it into the media spotlight is shock. How many times are we going to be shocked before serious steps are taken to alleviate the terrible suffering and prevent the horrible deaths of as many of these children as we can?

■ We know some things about child abuse and neglect. We know that there is a profound connection between child abuse and substance abuse, for example. We know that abuse and neglect are more likely to occur in households where money is in short supply, especially if the caregivers are unemployed. A crisis in the home heightens the chances that a child will be abused. And adults who were abused as children are more likely than others to be abusers themselves.

Child-abuse prevention programs are wholly inadequate, and child protective services, while varying in quality from state to state, are in many instances overwhelmed and largely unaccountable. The child protection system has broken down — or was never up and running at all — in state after state after state.

"There are no consequences to violating policy," said Marcia Robinson Lowry, executive director of the advocacy group Children's Rights. "There are no consequences to violating the law."

The kids who are most frequently the victims of abuse are from the lower economic classes. They are not from families that make a habit of voting. There is no real incentive for government officials to make the protection of these kids a priority.

They couldn't be more alone. They are no one's natural constituency. □

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We're shocked at  
child abuse — each  
and every time.

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Published March 9, 2006

[ From the Lansing State Journal ]

## **Doug Cruce: LSJ's job - investigate state's failures**

I can only hope the March 6 LSJ editorial ("Verdict in") concerning the collective guilt of Michigan citizens for the death of Ricky Holland was some sort of spoof, designed to get people to really think about finally solving problems in our state.

If LSJ editors were serious, the media are much more mixed up than many people already believe them to be.

The death of this innocent young boy is tragic; something that no one wants to ever see happen again. But I can tell you with certainty that it will, if the perpetrators - and the ones who didn't do their jobs at the state and local levels to prevent it - are not severely punished.

The people of Michigan are no more guilty of the unfortunate death of Ricky than are the people of New York for the deaths of those at the World Trade Center on 9/11.

As citizens, we pay billions of dollars a year to all levels of government. But when that government fails to do its basic job, we hear from the LSJ that it is our fault?

The editorial referred to the collective "finger-pointing" in state government. But the LSJ would be providing a much better service if it would focus on why this actually happened, and help us better understand why we are not getting the services and protection for which we pay.

The LSJ is part of the system, and we expect more of the press than the implication that we need to throw more money at our problems.

Ricky Holland's death and the recent killings of three people as an alleged result of mistakes by prison officials are strong indicators of systems failure at all levels of government in our state. I believe the LSJ has an obligation to get to the bottom of this problem, rather than join what is already a long line of finger-pointers who have failed to do their job.

The LSJ is still in a position to do something. Spend some time investigating. We need your help ... and please tell me you were not serious!

Doug Cruce lives in Williamston.

# **Woman accused of molesting teen boy who baby-sat infant**

## **Alleged sex with 13-year-old a 15-year felony**

PUBLISHED: March 9, 2006

By Norb Franz  
Macomb Daily Staff Writer

A Warren woman faces up to 15 years in prison on charges she sexually assaulted a teenage boy who baby-sat her infant child.

Detectives have stopped short of saying it was a consensual incident between the 23-year-old woman and 13-year-old boy. Nevertheless, such contact is criminal under Michigan law because a person cannot legally consent to sex until age 16.

Melissa Jean Grifford, who is free on a \$100,000 personal recognizance bond, is charged with one count of third-degree criminal sexual conduct, involving penetration.

Warren police said the incident occurred in late December inside Grifford's home on Ready Avenue in the Jackson Trailer Park, near Van Dyke and Nine Mile Road.

"It's tough to say if it was consensual. We've got mixed statements" from the boy and the woman, Detective Sgt. James Matheney said.

The teenager occasionally worked as a baby sitter to Grifford's child, police said. The 13-year-old resides in the mobile home complex.

"He's a friend. He goes over there every once in a while to see how the kid is doing," Matheney said.

Investigators did not know whether the infant was home or if anyone else was in the accused woman's residence at the time of the alleged incident. But detectives believe Grifford initiated the contact.

Eventually, word got around the neighborhood and reached the boy's father. The father questioned his son and brought him to the Warren Police Department to file a report and speak to officers.

Police then contacted Grifford, who agreed to go to the police station to be questioned by a detective. After investigators later obtained the felony warrant, she turned herself in for arraignment.

Her attorney, Kimberly Brown, could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

Grifford, employed as a waitress, failed to appear for a preliminary hearing Tuesday in 37th District Court. Judge Jennifer Faunce was prepared to issue a bench warrant for Grifford's arrest, but the accused Warren woman showed up in court late, explaining that she missed a bus.

The probable-cause hearing has been rescheduled to March 21.

# Teacher Accused of Being Sexual Predator

By Heather Catallo

Web produced by Christine Lasek

March 8, 2006

A local high school teacher has traded his classroom for a jail cell, after getting busted in an internet sex sting.

A teacher from Mt. Clemens High School is accused of being an internet sexual predator.

Investigators from the State Attorney General's Office say 43-year-old Louis Aaron Pressell spent the last 2 months chatting online with someone he thought was a 13-year-old girl.

State agents say Pressell was trying to set up a meeting with the girl, to engage in sexual activity, but he was actually talking to members of the Attorney General's Internet Child Protection Unit.

Investigators say on Sunday, the high school chemistry teacher drove to Novi to meet the 13-year-old. Instead, he was arrested, and Pressell was charged with 2 felonies.

Parents of students who know Mr. Pressell are appalled.

Janet Goliday, a Mt. Clemens High School parent, said, "I am astounded! I cannot believe this! Not in Mt. Clemens! What?"

"I just got the note today and I am appalled. I mean, just to ask a child, it's outrageous. It's just scary," Venus Sanders, another parent, stated.

School District officials say Pressell has been at the High School about 8 years, teaching primarily 11th and 12th graders. They say they have not had any complaints from students about him, but they are very upset about Pressell's arrest.

Phil Easter, of the Mt. Clemens School District, said, "I think that's probably the most heinous of any... I can't think of any or worse offence for a professional teacher to be involved in."

# Psychological exam set for Sturgis man charged in assault

Thursday, March 9, 2006

By Jef Rietsma  
Special to the Kalamazoo Gazette

CENTREVILLE -- A Sturgis man charged with kidnapping and sexually assaulting a 10-year-old boy will undergo a psychological examination before a judge decides whether he will stand trial.

A hearing scheduled for today for 21-year-old Sean Lucas has been delayed indefinitely. St. Joseph County Prosecutor Doug Fisher said Wednesday that Lucas will be evaluated at a state forensic center in Ann Arbor for at least eight weeks.

The prosecutor has alleged that Lucas entered the Village Manor Apartment complex in Sturgis through a basement window and took a boy from his bedroom to a nearby vacant apartment, where he sexually assaulted him. He was charged with kidnapping/child enticement, first- and second-degree criminal sexual conduct, home invasion and assault with a dangerous weapon. Fisher said St. Joseph County District Court Judge Jeff Middleton ordered that Lucas undergo psychological tests. ``When there is a question about the mental sanity of a person, whether at the time of the offense or if the suspect is fit to stand trial, a psychological examination is not that unusual," the prosecutor said.

# Attorney charged with possessing child porn on PC

By Michael P. McConnell

Daily Tribune Staff Writer

PUBLISHED: March 9, 2006

## Computer repair technician discovered explicit pictures on hard drive

MADISON HEIGHTS — An attorney who prosecutors say has worked as an adjunct professor at Wayne State Law School is charged with downloading and possessing child pornography from the Internet.

Dennis Moffett, 69, of Detroit, was in Madison Heights 43rd District Court on Wednesday for a preliminary hearing where he faces two counts of possessing child sexually abusive material and two counts of using a computer to commit a crime.

Moffett took his computer to a Best Buy outlet in September 2004 to be repaired.

A technician at the store who did the repair testified he found pictures of naked children when he downloaded Moffett's hard drive. The store then called Madison Heights police.

Oakland County Assistant Prosecutor Robert Giles said the explicit photos originated from a Web site in the former Soviet Union.

The case was delayed because it was first referred to Wayne County, where Moffett lives, then referred back to Oakland County, Giles said.

Wayne County Sheriff's deputies examined Moffett's computer.

Wayne Deputy Norman Gibson testified that there were about 11,000 photos on Moffett's computer though he couldn't say how many were child pornography beyond several hundred.

Moffett's attorney James Galen questioned Gibson, who acknowledged that while he could tell what was on a computer he could not determine who put it there.

Madison Heights Detective Sgt. Corey Haines testified that Moffett told him he was thinking about writing a book about child pornography and downloaded some photos as part of his research.

The preliminary hearing was adjourned and is set to continue at 8 a.m. March 15 in Judge Robert Turner's courtroom.

Each of the four counts against Moffett is a four-year felony.

Contact Michael P. McConnell at [mike.mcconnell@dailytribune.com](mailto:mike.mcconnell@dailytribune.com) or 248-571-2571.

# Police Hunt Girl, 13, From Cellphone Clues

By JOHN HOLL  
The New York Times

Published: March 9, 2006

JERSEY CITY, March 8 — The police here are searching for a 13-year-old girl who was last seen on Monday morning walking to school.

Reena Rose Sibayan/The Jersey Journal, via Associated Press

Patrick and Stella Browne spoke Wednesday about the disappearance of their daughter, Natasha, 13, in Jersey City on Monday.

Investigators said that several text messages sent from her cellphone to her mother that day said that she had been abducted, but other messages to friends included no hint of trouble.

The girl, Natasha M. Browne of Jersey City, was last seen on Monday morning as she left her house on Terhune Avenue to walk to the nearby Public School 34 in the city's Greenville section, the Jersey City police chief, Robert Troy, said at a news conference on Wednesday.

He called her disappearance suspicious but said there was not enough evidence to determine if she had been abducted or if she was the person who sent the text messages to her mother and friends.

But he said: "Her disappearance is totally out of character. She is a good student, no problems with the family. Her friends are concerned, her school is concerned, her parents are concerned and we are concerned."

Chief Troy said the girl never arrived at school. Around 11 a.m., a text message was sent from her cellphone to her mother, reading as if it was from Natasha, saying that someone had been following her and that she was in the basement of a house but did not know how she got there. Several other messages were sent to her mother from her phone during the day, including one at 4:43 p.m. that said, "he is telling me they will hurt me if I don't listen to them ... I can't see their faces."

The messages were published on Tuesday in The Jersey Journal, which got them from the girl's mother, Stella Browne.

The last message, received at 8:55 p.m., was relayed from a cellular tower in Union City, Chief Troy said. It read, "They are taking me to New York."

But he also said that other messages from her cellphone were sent to friends on Monday with no mention that she was in trouble. One message said that she had a doctor's appointment on Monday and that she would be in school on Tuesday.

"That didn't happen, so we have to sort out the truth," Chief Troy said. "It's odd, but until we see her and until we know she is O.K., we won't make any comments as far as opinions go."

He said attempts to reach Natasha on her cellphone were unsuccessful. "They go right to voice mail," he said. Chief Troy also said the police were investigating a report that she might have been spotted in Fairview, N.J., since her disappearance, but did not elaborate.

The New Jersey State Police's missing persons unit and the Hudson County prosecutor's office are assisting with the investigation.

Chief Troy said several people were being interviewed, but gave no further details. "I can't say anything more about that," he said. "We need to get Natasha home."



# Convict may hold key to child killer case

Web-posted Mar 9, 2006

By KORIE WILKINS  
Of The Oakland Press

OAK PARK - A convicted killer could provide investigators with new information that could help solve the Oakland County Child Killer case, police say.

Richard Lawson, 60, was recently convicted of the 1989 murder of a Livonia man, Exavor Giller. Sgt. Garry Gray of the Michigan State Police said authorities have learned of Lawson's ties to the Cass Corridor area of Detroit in the 1970s around the time of the child killings. Gray said the Cass Corridor was a hotbed for criminal activity at the time, including pedophilia and child pornography.

Lawson, who will be sentenced March 21, also worked as an informant for the Detroit Police Department.

"He's a very high person of interest," Gray said.

The latest lead in the case isn't expected to yield any big announcements any time soon, Gray said. Investigators will do what they have been doing for the past several years: conducting interviews, tracking down leads and trying to solve the case.

Gray said he couldn't provide many more details. But he said Lawson did give investigators some good information.

"We'll see what happens," he said.

On Tuesday, Lawson was convicted of first-degree murder and armed robbery before Wayne County Circuit Court Judge Michael Hathaway. Officials say he gunned down Giller, a cab company owner, at Giller's home in a robbery attempt. Lawson's attorney, James O'Donnell, could not be reached for comment.

Former Detroit Police Chief Isaiah McKinnon said Lawson gave officers information about child molesters while he was a police informant. McKinnon worked in the department's sex crimes unit at the time, and he said Lawson helped uncover a child pornography ring in Detroit.

"He knew all about that underworld," McKinnon said. "He knew so much about the Cass Corridor at the time it's hard to dismiss what he might know about this case."

McKinnon said the Cass Corridor was a cesspool where anything could be bought, including prostitutes and drugs. Knowing what he knows about Lawson's involvement with the area, McKinnon is optimistic about this latest lead.

"I'm hopeful the case will be solved," he said. "I'm always hopeful."

The killings, which started in Oakland County in 1976, shocked and horrified parents, who tried to keep their children indoors.

The victims were 12-year-old Mark Stebbins, abducted while walking near his Ferndale home Feb. 15, 1976; 12-year-old Jill Robinson, taken in Royal Oak on Dec. 22, 1976; 10-year-old Kristine Mihelich, snatched near her Berkley home Jan. 2, 1977; and 11-year-old Timothy King, kidnapped from a grocery store parking lot near his home in Birmingham on March 16, 1977. The killer was dubbed "the baby sitter" because he kept his victims alive for days, feeding and bathing them before murdering them and leaving their bodies for others to find. Two of the children were raped.

Through the years, a series of strong leads has developed, but, so far, none has resulted in an arrest.

"This is one of many leads that raises the hopes of the family and the community," said Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson, who was the county's prosecutor at the time of the killings. "We have to be very careful before speculating that this will be fruitful. Of course, we'll continue to chase down leads, but in a case like this, the worst enemy is time."

Since the child killer case was revitalized last year, there have been several new leads. Recently, Michigan State Police investigators said DNA tests of four possible suspects - two living and two dead - did not match what officials believe is a sample from the killer. The samples were sent to the FBI's crime lab in Quantico, Va. Investigators said those findings didn't rule out any of the four suspects. A match could confirm the identity of the killer. The samples were tested against a single hair found on one of the children. Investigators say the case is not considered a cold case. "We will continue to investigate every lead," Gray said.

# The public's right to know

The Grand Rapids Press

Thursday, March 09, 2006

Michigan lawmakers have passed legislation that unnecessarily erodes public and press access to criminal records of convicted school employees. If the records are illuminating then they should see the light. Period. The files are public records and should be open, without the exemption system the Legislature has created.

Under the bill, background checks conducted by the Michigan State Police are exempted from the state's Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) for 15 business days. The bill also limits details released to misdemeanors involving physical or sexual abuse or any felony.

Parents and the public in general deserve to know about all convictions. The existing FOIA language allows enough time (five days plus a 10-day extension) to double-check data. The legislation sets a bad precedent that can creep into other legislation.

A state law that took effect in January required the State Police to do criminal background checks of about 200,000 school employees. Those with sex-related crimes are to be fired.

In February, some employees were wrongly identified on lists sent to school districts, leading to an injunction and a recall of the list. Lawmakers responded with legislation that requires the Michigan Department of Education and State Police to work together to ensure accuracy of school employee conviction information. Districts have 15 business days to verify the list with workers.

The initial execution by the State Police was poor, but the department has promised a more accurate list this month. The more extensive inquiry should address earlier errors, but districts still should check the information. They just don't need 15 days on top of the 15 days already available under FOIA to do it -- all of which

comes after the State Police and DOE have already vetted the list. If the state is going to err on the side of anybody, it should be the child. This is time that could potentially save a child from a predator.

The state should not decide which convicted criminals are threats. There are other crimes besides misdemeanors involving physical or sexual abuse or any felony that some parents may feel put their children at risk: crimes that speak to character and judgment such as drunken driving, drug offenses or fraudulent credit card use. Parents should be able to know who their child is exposed to directly or indirectly, since they are required by law to have them at school. This is not a "witch hunt" as a Michigan Education Association official claimed.

If this legislation stands, with its limitations and 15-day FOIA exemption, the impact will be seen in other bills. The Michigan Press Association is already trying to change a provision in existing legislation that exempts the central database of criminal records of long-term and adult foster care workers from FOIA.

What's at stake here is not simply the release of records about employees working among Michigan's most vulnerable people but accountability. Michigan lawmakers are responsible for making sure information is correct and available to the public. The Freedom of Information Act requires disclosure of such data. It mandates, in effect, an open public book. Lawmakers shouldn't be deleting or covering up pages, even for 15 days.

Jackson Citizen Patriot

March 9, 2006

Letters

## **A call to women: Don't be so desperate for men**

JACKSON -- The Citizen Patriot headline read, "Cops: Girl, 5, a sex victim":

Why are there so many children being sexually assaulted? No supervision, trusting these strange men we're meeting out of desperation and loneliness!

I'm a single mom, but I watch my kids! Not all is due to negligence, but I see how many women allow men in and out of their lives and homes and the poor kids come second. I'm sure if my daughter was coming home with new "Barbie dolls" and hanging out at McDonald's (or anywhere) with a man (even a boyfriend of mine), I'd wonder about him!

Oh, and the 46-year-old suspect had served time for assaulting a 9-year-old girl, but told the mother of the 5-year-old that his prison time was for having sex with a 16-year-old girl. Well, big deal! Age doesn't matter that much when it comes to sexual assault!

Women, stop making excuses for the men you hang out with! Don't be so desperate! Our world is getting worse because of lack of parental love, attention and supervision. These are your children. Children need you, not a fill-in dad! They are in your life for a short time for you to protect, love and teach them about life, God and love. Treat them with respect and talk to them like people, not dogs! I see moms every day dragging, swearing and yelling at their kids (and the man they're with). Where are the "ladies" in Jackson? Kids are dying for attention.

-- Kathy Bykowski

# Program tries to change how foster care children are handled

3/9/2006, 12:49 p.m. ET

By KATHY BARKS HOFFMAN  
The Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — The state is trying to keep more children out of foster care by working with parents and trying to place children with relatives if they have to be removed from their parents.

"Family to Family has as its goal to keep children at home as much as possible if we can do so safely," state Human Services director Marianne Udow told reporters Thursday. "We have made a fundamental change in philosophy" regarding foster care over the past two years.

The Family to Family approach already is in place in 38 counties. This year, it will be spread to 28 more counties, so 85 percent of children will be in counties covered by the program. The state had 18,733 children in foster care last year.

Udow also said her department is investigating more complaints of child abuse and neglect and finding more of those complaints are warranted.

While the number of complaints dropped by about 100 to 128,884 between 2000 and 2005, the number of complaints investigated rose from 69,400 five years ago to 72,286 last year.

The number of cases in which abuse or neglect was confirmed rose from 15,210 to 18,100, and the number of children found to be abused or neglected rose from 26,888 to 28,192.

Child deaths attributable to abuse or neglect stayed the same, with 52 in both 2000 and 2004, the most recent year for which data is available.

"Fifty-two is unacceptable," Udow said. "We've had too many kids who have been abandoned. Moms don't know they can take the child to a hospital ... no questions asked."

Child deaths also have been caused by parents putting infants to sleep on their stomachs, which can impede the infants' breathing, or suffocating them when they roll over them in bed, she said.

Udow declined to discuss the death of Ricky Holland, a 7-year-old whose adoptive parents have been charged with killing him, now that court proceedings are under way.

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On the Net:

Michigan Department of Human Services: <http://www.michigan.gov/dhs>

# Talk to Sandra



PHOTO BY PHOTO VISION

Sandra Amen-Bryan

# حديث مع ساندرا

One of the topics I am frequently contacted about is the issue of foster care and adoption. These are areas I have explored both personally and professionally. They are complex subjects involving the lives and feelings of children, adults, extended families, and the need to negotiate the medical and legal systems. The process can be an emotional and financial roller coaster. That is why I am so excited to inform our readers about a new model of foster care that has been implemented by the State of Michigan as well as numerous administrations in Alabama, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Florida, California, and Georgia.

The current approach for children in the welfare system is called Family to Family. This model got its start in the state of Ohio with the generous philanthropic funding from the Anna E. Casey Foundation who set a goal to reform child welfare. The successful outcomes over the past ten years in Ohio have led the foundation to facilitate changes in other state governments and Michigan is a fortunate recipient. Michigan has a staggering 19,000 children in the welfare system, so there are many young lives that stand to be positively impacted by these measures.

My best estimate is that there are approximately 200-300 Arab/Muslim children in the welfare system at any given time who need placement. Removal from the birth parents takes place because of abuse, neglect, or death of one or both parents. The problem of violence in families is a continual reason why children and teenagers have to be protected by institutions. The positive news about Family to Family is the approach seeks to utilize other family members for relocation to help keep a child in their own neighborhood and their same school. When a child is grieving, scared, and traumatized, they should

## Family to Family

**Do you need someone to turn to? Do you have a question?  
E-mail Sandra anonymously with your health questions.**

**sandra@forumandlink.com**

Sandra is licensed by the State of Michigan as a Psychologist Limited License-Masters. She has over 20 years experience in the field of counseling and therapy with adults, adolescents, and children.

*Letters become the property of Forum & Link and may be edited for clarity, grammar, and space restrictions.*

be with people who know them, speak their language, share their culture, and love them. They should not be with strangers who may not even be able to pronounce their name or who have no idea of what they normally eat.

Family to Family seeks to reduce the overall number of removals with better screening and to cushion the placement of children in a number of ways. There is an emphasis on preventive actions to help parents provide a safe, stable environment for their children by offering assistance that is needed. If this goal cannot be achieved within a reasonable time frame and a child's safety remains at risk, then every effort is made to transfer the child's care to either another family member or a foster family who lives in their community and most closely

matches the child's culture, religion, race, and language.

There is a saying that states, "It takes a village to raise a child." Well there are many "villagers" who are desperately needed to help vulnerable children cope with situations beyond their control. Whether you are an Arab/Muslim family, African-American, Asian, Hispanic or of various ethnic, cultural, or racial backgrounds, there are families in your community who need your understanding, your advocacy, and your care.

Family to Family seeks to keep children in their most natural environment. To accomplish this they need more foster families who are willing to partner with birth families, community members, and the Department of

Human Services. Within this context, the biggest need is to place brothers and sisters together and to provide a home to teenagers. Adolescents are the kids we as a society judge so harshly because we assume they are all young criminals when they actually have so much to offer. They are the oldest child survivors from abusive, violent, harmful situations and usually carry the deepest scars.

Some of the goals of the partnership would be to reduce the length children are in care, reduce the number of placements into different families and increase reunification with the birth family.

Another way to get involved with this exciting approach is to become a Community Representative. In this role an individual would present alternative ideas both to the family and the Department of Human Services. For example, instead of agreeing to remove children from their home, the community rep might have ideas, knowledge, or resources for furniture, food, employment, child care, rent money, etc. The community rep is asked to attend a meeting in order to support the family, to help the family understand the process, and to help bridge any gaps in cultural, religious, or language differences. You are there to provide a friendly face for the family and to help them negotiate the state system while maintaining a realistic view of all the factors involved.

Some of our readers have taken the initiative long ago and become licensed for foster care without having the opportunity to care for the specific children they set out to help. If you are one of these individuals or know of someone who is, please reconsider your desire to help children in need. Traci Kress is a top notch individual and a coordinator with the Family to Family initiative and she will answer any questions or concerns you may have. Contact her at 313-578-5116.

**Tell us what you think.  
Visit [www.forumandlink.com](http://www.forumandlink.com)**

# Opting out of fatherhood?

Thursday, March 09, 2006

DAVID CRARY  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK -- Saginaw Township resident Matt Dubay isn't ready to become a father, although he has fathered a child.

Dubay, 25, and the National Center for Men have prepared a lawsuit -- already nicknamed *Roe v. Wade for Men* -- scheduled for filing today in U.S. District Court in Bay City on behalf of the computer programmer.

The Saginaw County Friend of the Court has ordered Dubay, who works for Yeo & Yeo Computer Consulting, to pay \$500 a month in child support to his former girlfriend, Lauren Wells, and her daughter.

Dubay contends that Wells, also of Saginaw Township, knew he didn't want to have a child with her and assured him repeatedly that -- because of a physical condition -- she could not get pregnant.

Saginaw County court files show that Dubay acknowledged paternity Aug. 24. The News could not reach Wells for comment today.

Dubay says he is braced for the lawsuit to fail.

"What I expect to hear (from the court) is that the way things are is not really fair, but that's the way it is," he said. "Just to create awareness would be enough, to at least get a debate started."

The suit addresses the issue of male reproductive rights, contending that lack of such rights violates the U.S. Constitution's equal protection clause.

Contending that women have more options than they do in the event of an unintended pregnancy, men's rights activists are mounting a long shot legal campaign aimed at giving them the chance to opt out of financial responsibility for raising a child.

The gist of the argument: If a pregnant woman can choose among abortion, adoption or raising a child, a man involved in an unintended pregnancy should have the choice of declining the financial responsibilities of fatherhood.

The activists involved hope to spark discussion even if they lose.

"There's such a spectrum of choice that women have -- it's her body, her pregnancy and she has the ultimate right to make decisions," said Mel Feit, director of the Long Island, N.Y.-based National Center for Men. "I'm trying to find a way for a man also to have some say over decisions that affect his life profoundly."

Since the early 1990s, Feit's organization has tried to pursue such a case, and finally found a suitable plaintiff in Dubay.

State courts have ruled in the past that any inequity experienced by men such as Dubay is outweighed by society's interest in ensuring that children get financial support from two parents. Melanie Jacobs, a Michigan State University law professor, said the federal court might rule similarly in Dubay's case.

"The courts are trying to say it may not be so fair that this gentleman has to support a child he didn't want, but it's less fair to say society has to pay the support," she said.

Feit, however, says a fatherhood opt-out wouldn't necessarily impose higher costs on society or the mother. A woman who balked at abortion but felt she couldn't afford to raise a child could put the baby up for adoption, he said.

Jennifer Brown of the women's rights advocacy group Legal Momentum objected to the men's center comparing Dubay's lawsuit to Roe v. Wade, the 1973 Supreme Court ruling establishing a woman's right to have an abortion.

"Roe is based on an extreme intrusion by the government -- literally to force a woman to continue a pregnancy she doesn't want," Brown said. "There's nothing equivalent for men. They have the same ability as women to use contraception, to get sterilized."

Feit counters that the suit's reference to abortion rights is apt.

"Roe says a woman can choose to have intimacy and still have control over subsequent consequences," he said. "No one has ever asked a federal court if that means men should have some similar say."

"The problem is this is so politically incorrect," Feit added. "The public is still dealing with the pre-Roe ethic when it comes to men, that if a man fathers a child, he should accept responsibility."

Feit doesn't advocate an unlimited fatherhood opt-out; he proposes a brief period in which a man, after learning of an unintended pregnancy, could decline parental responsibilities if the relationship was one in which neither partner had desired a child.

"If the woman changes her mind and wants the child, she should be responsible," Feit said. "If she can't take care of the child, adoption is a good alternative."



Thursday, March 09, 2006

## **Dads: No cash for unwanted children**

**In lawsuit, activists argue if women have right to decide fate of fetus, fathers can decline financial role.**

David Shepardson and Eric Lacy / The Detroit News

A national men's rights group plans to file a federal lawsuit this morning in U.S. District Court in Detroit, claiming that fathers have the legal right to opt out of the financial responsibilities of supporting a child they didn't want -- in a claim they dub "Roe v. Wade ... for Men."

A Troy lawyer for the New York-based National Center for Men said he will file a long-shot lawsuit on behalf of 25-year-old Matt Dubay of Saginaw that seeks an order declaring the Michigan Paternity Act unconstitutional. Dubay recently was ordered to pay support for his 8-month-old daughter.

In 2004, Dubay, a computer technician, began dating a woman who worked in cell phone sales. He said she told him she couldn't get pregnant -- because she was using contraception and had physical conditions that prevented her from getting pregnant.

After three months, they stopped dating -- but soon afterward, she told him she was pregnant.

"It's just not fair. She has options in this. As a man, I have no options and am forced to live with her choices," Dubay said Wednesday night. "I was up front. I was clear that I didn't want to be a father and she reassured me that she was incapable of getting pregnant."

After learning of the pregnancy, they discussed adoption.

"I was trying to talk reason, to try and have a two-way conversation. She considered an adoption but then quickly stopped listening," Dubay said.

So he researched the issue and found the National Center for Men in New York, which agreed to take his case.

"The whole issue is, she made the decision based knowing that I wasn't going to be there for the child in any part and she said she could raise the child on her own," Dubay said.

Troy lawyer Jeffrey A. Cojocar, who is filing the lawsuit for the National Center for Men, acknowledged it will be an uphill battle.

"No one is denying this is going to be difficult. But we want the law applied equally between sexes. They each should have a say about a child's future," Cojocar said.

Women's organizations oppose the lawsuit because it leaves the child and mother to fend for themselves.

"This is ridiculous," said Leslie Sorkhe, director of operations for the Association for Children for Enforcement of Support. "This is about the child, a child that needs the emotional as well as the financial support of both parents. The child is entitled to his or her equal protection under the law."

Renee Beeker of Milford, legislative vice president for National Organization for Women's Michigan chapter, says the lawsuit implies that the burden of pregnancy prevention is solely on the woman.

"In the event of an unintended pregnancy, the needs of the child must be met," Beeker said.

The National Center for Men and its president don't want to be able to force women to have abortions or give up a child for adoption. They want to be able to go into court before a child is born and renounce parenting responsibilities -- and 18 years of child support.

"More than three decades ago, Roe v. Wade gave women control of their reproductive lives but nothing in the law changed for men. ... Women now have control of their lives after an unplanned conception," said Mel Feit, the group's director. "But men are routinely forced to give up control, forced to be financially responsible for choices only women are permitted to make, forced to relinquish reproductive choice as the price of intimacy."

Cojocar admits that courts across the United States have routinely thrown out lawsuits by fathers who claimed women committed fraud by lying about taking precautions to avoid getting pregnant. Those courts have typically found a greater state interest in ensuring that minor children are supported. This claim is different in that it cites the U.S. Constitution's equal protection clause.

But, the men's group says it should be more than biology.

"We will argue that, at a time of reproductive freedom for women, fatherhood must be more than a matter of DNA," Feit said. "A man must choose to be a father in the same way that a woman chooses to be a mother."

Saginaw County Circuit Judge Patrick McGraw recently ordered Dubay to pay \$475 a month -- plus half of all health care expenses for the baby girl, Cojocar said.

He sold his dream car, a 1998 Trans Am, and took in a roommate to stretch his budget so he can begin to make child support payments next month. He has seen his daughter once -- when he took a DNA test to establish paternity.

The child's mother didn't return calls seeking comment.

Michigan Attorney General Mike Cox, who has made collecting unpaid child support a top issue, said fathers must support their children, regardless of the circumstances of the births.

"If the subject is child support, our focus should be on children, not on squabbles between the parents," Cox said. His office has collected more than \$23 million in child support, his office will announce today.

Michigan parents owe more than \$7 billion in unpaid child support -- part of the \$100 billion owed nationwide by parents who fail to support their children.

Legal experts say a ruling allowing men to opt out of support could open a Pandora's box, forcing the state to pick up the difference to support children of single parents.

The planned suit names the girl's mother, who is 20, and the Saginaw County prosecutor as defendants.

*You can reach David Shepardson at (313) 222-2028 or [dshepardson@detnews.com](mailto:dshepardson@detnews.com).*

Published March 9, 2006

[ From the Lansing State Journal ]

## **Men suing for right to decline fatherhood Suit says lack of reproductive rights unlawful**

By David Crary  
Associated Press

NEW YORK - Contending that women have more options than they do in the event of an unintended pregnancy, men's rights activists are mounting a long shot legal campaign aimed at giving them the chance to opt out of financial responsibility for raising a child.

The National Center for Men has prepared a lawsuit - nicknamed Roe v. Wade for Men - to be filed today in U.S. District Court in Michigan on behalf of a 25-year-old computer programmer ordered to pay child support for his ex-girlfriend's daughter. The suit addresses the issue of male reproductive rights, contending that lack of such rights violates the U.S. Constitution's equal protection clause.

The gist of the argument: If a pregnant woman can choose among abortion, adoption or raising a child, a man involved in an unintended pregnancy should have the choice of declining the financial responsibilities of fatherhood. The activists involved hope to spark discussion even if they lose.

"There's such a spectrum of choice that women have - it's her body, her pregnancy and she has the ultimate right to make decisions," said Mel Feit, director of the men's center. "I'm trying to find a way for a man also to have some say over decisions that affect his life profoundly."

Feit's organization has been trying since the early 1990s to pursue such a lawsuit, and finally found a suitable plaintiff in Matt Dubay of Saginaw.

Dubay says he must pay \$500 a month in child support for a girl born last year to his ex-girlfriend. He contends that the woman knew he didn't want to have a child with her and assured him repeatedly that - because of a physical condition - she could not get pregnant.

"Just to create awareness would be enough, to at least get a debate started," Dubay said in a phone interview.

**MIRS**  
**March 8, 2006**

## **DHS Responds To Adoption Subsidy**

Before a joint House meeting, the Department of Human Services (DHS) responded to complaints from adoptive parents who argue the department hasn't been giving families with disabled children adoption subsidies.

The subsidies are funded by federal and state governments and are an optional program each state can enter into. The subsidies are designed to give financial help to families who adopt children that have special needs.

During testimony before the House Family and Children Services Committee and the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Department of Human Services, several parents of adoptive children with special needs made three general complaints.

They claimed the department doesn't tell parents about the program and that if it does tell parents about the program before the child is adopted, department representatives sometimes claim that the parents could lose the child while the parents are waiting for the subsidy.

According to written testimony provided by the department, Michigan subsidy expenditures have increased by 162 percent in the last 10 years increasing from \$80 million in 1996 to \$209 million in 2005.

The department also stated that more than 90 percent of kids adopted from the child welfare system in 2005 received adoption support subsidy funds.

One of the problems seems to be with guidelines

surrounding the subsidies. Michigan's subsidy guidelines are supposed to match federal guidelines but the parents say this isn't happening.

Parents claim that as a result of these discrepancies, they're not getting the subsidies they deserve. For example, many kids who seem developmentally fine when they're infants, develop serious emotional problems as they get older.

The department presented a slew of criteria that can be met in order for a child to qualify for the subsidy and age is one requirement. If a child is older than three, they qualify. However, parents with children that fit the age group are not qualifying.

Parents also complained that the department isn't fully disclosing the children's physical, mental and emotional history before the parents sign adoption papers.

The department's written testimony didn't include any response to this concern.

The committee is going to compare Michigan's subsidy guidelines to federal subsidy guidelines. Parents expressed that some of the problems with the system may be due to the fact that Michigan's guidelines are out of line with federal guidelines.

The committee discussed this issue last week and will continue to review testimony before making any kind of recommendations.

Michigan Report

March 8, 2006

## **ADOPTION SUBSIDY PROGRAM DRAWS CRITICISM**

Michigan residents who adopted children only to find out that they have severe mental and physical disorders after the adoption was finalized criticized the state's adoption subsidy program Wednesday before the House Family and Children Services Committee and House Appropriations Subcommittee on Human Services.

The four women who testified before the committees said that they were either not told about their child's exposure to mental and physical disorders or were denied subsidies to care for the special needs children by the state.

Dr. Tim O'Hanlon, a nationally recognized expert on the subject, also said that Michigan's adoption subsidy program is over-restrictive and non-complaint with federal law and could be in jeopardy of losing its funding.

Many states have helped special needs children who develop problems after the adoption is finalized by providing a payment deferment for subsidy so that parents have an insurance policy on a child and it costs the state nothing up front, Mr. O'Hanlon said.

Kate Hanley, director of adoption services for the Department of Human Services, said that Mr. O'Hanlon's proposal should be looked at, but also said that some of the women who came to testify are discussing cases that occurred in the 1990s.

She also said that Michigan is in federal compliance and that the federal system can be complex as to who is eligible for a subsidy.

Rep. John Stahl (R-North Branch) said the committees are not holding hearings to hold hearings, but are looking to work with the department to provide solutions to these issues that the women testified to.

# Health care reforms could make Michigan a standout

The Oakland Press    Web-posted Mar 8, 2006

## ***What could Michigan do to guarantee positive national attention, especially from potential job providers and job seekers?***

What could cut through and overshadow all of the bad news about the plight of the car companies and their suppliers, the high unemployment rate, runaway education costs and our lousy business climate?

The answer: Deliver health care to a lot more people for a lot less money.

By that alone, Michigan would become a standout state among the 50, a mecca for businesses and people looking for a good place to live.

Talk of this sort of change is plentiful and cheap, but there is reason to believe we've reached the point at which everybody involved wants to do something about the problem of lack of health care coverage and continual cost increases.

The Big Three automakers and organized labor are increasingly on the same page when it comes to the need to fix the problem.

Businesses, large and small, have complained for years. The turning point now is that the Michigan State Medical Society, representing medical doctors, is ready for radical change.

The MSMS has announced that it is putting together task forces representing all players in the system. Among other things, they'll answer the question of what basic care should be available across the board and devise a plan to vastly reduce the paperwork. Paperwork accounts for about a third of the cost of providing health care. That's obviously absurd.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm's economic advisory council has called for a start at eliminating the problem of uninsured residents, currently about 11 percent of the state's population.

If the administrative waste in the system were eliminated, more than \$9,000 a year per uninsured resident would be saved. It's not that reform would mean they'd literally get that money - it simply is a dramatic measure of the waste involved now.

As noted here before, the bitter irony is that the money is wasted in the name of cost control. It's called "billing." Insured medicine is practiced on a piecemeal basis. Each act is billed. Which ones are covered by insurance and for how much vary endlessly. Michigan Blue Cross Blue Shield alone has 70,000 coverage variations, according to the medical association.

The problem is greatly exacerbated by the industry's failure to fully computerize record keeping. Harvard University estimates that is costing \$400 billion nationally, money misleadingly listed as being spent on "health care."

Involving hand-held computers at bedsides also could improve care by reminding doctors of appropriate treatment. The New England Journal of Medicine reports that we get the recommended care only about half the time, such as an aspirin at the first indication of a heart attack.

Such handy computer access also could reduce the needless duplication of expensive tests simply because doctor A doesn't know what doctor B has done.

A big reduction in health care spending, along with basic coverage for all, would make Michigan a uniquely good place to live and do business. If we can't get an intellectual handle on this and get it done, we deserve our lousy reputation.

# Gobles teen charged in rape at Otsego High

Thursday, March 9, 2006

By Rex Hall Jr.

[rhall@kalamazoogazette.com](mailto:rhall@kalamazoogazette.com) 388-7784

A 15-year-old Gobles boy accused of raping a 14-year-old girl last month at Otsego High School was arraigned Wednesday on a charge of first-degree criminal sexual conduct.

Authorities have designated that the boy, if found guilty, could be sentenced as an adult or as a juvenile, Allegan County Prosecutor Fred Anderson said. The final decision would be made by a judge.

The charge against the teen stems from a Feb. 24 incident in which police were called to the high school at about 6:30 p.m. because of an assault involving two students, authorities said.

Dennis Patzer, superintendent for Otsego Public Schools, said administrators received a report of student misconduct the day of the alleged incident and "conducted a prompt investigation (in which) police were involved." Both police and Patzer declined to comment further.

The teen, who is being held in the Allegan County Youth Facility, is scheduled to appear in Allegan County Circuit Court Family Division again March 21 for a preliminary examination at which a judge will determine if there is enough evidence to bind his case over for trial.

If found guilty and sentenced as an adult, the teen could face up to life in prison.



# Attorney general sues owner of nursing homes after death

3/8/2006, 2:06 p.m. ET

By JAMES PRICHARD *The Associated Press*

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (AP) — After recently filing criminal charges against eight former employees of a Big Rapids nursing home in connection with the death of a patient, Michigan Attorney General Mike Cox is suing the company that owns the home.

Cox announced Wednesday that he filed a lawsuit against Metron Integrated Health Systems, as well as the nursing homes it owns and operates in Big Rapids, Allegan and Kalamazoo.

In a news release issued by his office, he said the facilities, which are subject to yearly inspections by the Michigan Department of Community Health, "have been operating in a manner that could endanger their residents."

Metron, which is based near Grand Rapids in Kent County's Cascade Township, owns and operates nine nursing homes in western Michigan.

David Mix, Metron's director of community relations and marketing, said the company was taken aback by the announcement because its lawyers have been working with the attorney general's office.

"The suit, as it was presented this morning (in Cox's news release), came as a little bit of a surprise to us, since we have been in discussions with them," Mix said.

Sarah Comer, 50, died Jan. 16, 2005, at Metron of Big Rapids a day after being transferred there from Spectrum Health Butterworth Campus in Grand Rapids. She was dependent on oxygen, but the nursing home allowed her oxygen tank to run empty, authorities have said.

Some of the eight people charged are accused of causing Comer's death through negligence. Others are accused of covering up the cause of her death. They face a variety of counts, including involuntary manslaughter.

Inspections of the Big Rapids facility in 2004 and 2005 led to 27 and 12 deficiency citations, respectively, well above the state average of seven, Cox said.

After receiving six deficiency citations in 2004, Metron of Allegan was cited for 21 last year, while Metron of Kalamazoo went from eight deficiency citations in 2004 to 15 in 2005.

Nursing facilities that serve Medicaid patients are required to comply with state and federal laws designed to promote high-quality care, Cox said.

The lawsuit, filed in Ingham County Circuit Court in Lansing, requests damages for Medicaid funds that paid for deficient care, he said. It also asks the court to order Metron to improve its operations and bring the three nursing homes into compliance with state and federal laws.

"The Metron facilities in Michigan received more than \$32 million from the state of Michigan Medicaid program last year," Cox said. "But even if they didn't get one penny from the taxpayers, Metron still has an obligation to protect the health and safety of all of their residents."

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On the Net:

Metron Integrated Health Services: <http://www.metronhealth.com>

# State files suit against nursing-home chain

Thursday, March 9, 2006

Kalamazoo Gazette News Service

LANSING -- After charging eight nursing home workers in connection with the death of a patient, Attorney General Mike Cox has filed suit against the parent company, Metron Integrated Health Systems, and its nursing homes in Allegan, Big Rapids and Kalamazoo.

Cox filed the lawsuit in Ingham County Circuit Court to recoup Medicaid funds used for "deficient care," he said in a statement.

He asked for an injunction that he said would improve operations and bring the three nursing homes into compliance with state and federal laws.

Metron officials have declined comment.

Cox has filed criminal charges, ranging from involuntary manslaughter to accessory after the fact, against workers at the Big Rapids center in the Jan. 16, 2005, death of Sarah Comer, 50. She was dependent on oxygen, but the nursing home allowed her oxygen tank to run empty, authorities say.

Some were accused of negligence in her death; others were accused of covering up the cause of death.

Cox said Metron's nursing homes in Kalamazoo, Allegan, and Big Rapids endangered residents.

He said the state conducts annual evaluations, which showed higher-than-normal deficiencies.

Kalamazoo increased from eight violations in 2004 to 15 last year, and Allegan jumped from five in 2004 to 21 in 2005, Cox said. In Big Rapids, inspectors issued 27 deficiency violations in 2004, and 12 last year.

"There are some practices that could endanger some of the residents which is why we are taking the civil action that we are," said Rusty Hills, director of communications for the Attorney General's office.

"We haven't uncovered anything that would (suggest other) criminal activity at this point, but there are policies and procedures that need to be changed."

Hills said Metron of Kalamazoo, with 140 beds, had \$3.2 million of Medicaid billing last year; Metron of Allegan, with 103 beds, billed Medicaid \$4.2 million.

Cox said Metron facilities received more than \$32 million from the state Medicaid program last year.

The Cascade Township-based Metron Integrated Health Systems has nine homes in West Michigan.

The Kalamazoo Gazette's Rosemary Parker contributed to this story.

Published March 9, 2006

[ From the Lansing State Journal ]

## **Cox sues owner of nursing homes after patient's death**

### **8 ex-employees already charged in Jan. incident**

By James Prichard  
Associated Press

After recently filing criminal charges against eight former employees of a Big Rapids nursing home in connection with the death of a patient, Michigan Attorney General Mike Cox is suing the company that owns the home.

Cox announced Wednesday that he filed a lawsuit against Metron Integrated Health Systems, as well as the nursing homes it owns and operates in Big Rapids, Allegan and Kalamazoo.

In a news release issued by his office, he said the facilities, which are subject to yearly inspections by the Michigan Department of Community Health, "have been operating in a manner that could endanger their residents."

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David Mix, Metron's director of community relations and marketing, said the company was taken aback by the announcement because its lawyers have been working with the attorney general's office.

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Some of the eight people charged are accused of causing Comer's death through negligence. Others are accused of covering up the cause of her death. They face a variety of counts, including involuntary manslaughter.

Inspections of the Big Rapids facility in 2004 and 2005 led to 27 and 12 deficiency citations, respectively, well above the state average of seven, Cox said.

After receiving six deficiency citations in 2004, Metron of Allegan was cited for 21 last year, while Metron of Kalamazoo went from eight deficiency citations in 2004 to 15 in 2005.

The lawsuit, filed in Ingham County Circuit Court in Lansing, requests damages for Medicaid funds that paid for deficient care, he said. It also asks the court to order Metron to improve its operations and bring the three nursing homes into compliance with state and federal laws.

# Nursing home lawsuit a warning, Cox says

Thursday, March 09, 2006

By Pat Shellenbarger

MUSKEGON CHRONICLE NEWS SERVICE

His lawsuit against a Cascade Township-based nursing home chain is a warning to all nursing homes in Michigan that they must meet state and federal standards of care, Attorney General Mike Cox said.

The lawsuit, filed Wednesday in Ingham County Circuit Court, accuses Metron Integrated Health Systems and its nursing homes in Allegan, Big Rapids and Kalamazoo of committing fraud by collecting Medicaid payments while falling short of the government's standards.

Although the lawsuit demands the nursing homes repay an unspecified amount of the money, the main purpose is to force them to improve the care they give their residents, Cox said, adding it's the first time he has used such a tactic. Similar lawsuits have been used in other states to force businesses to comply with government regulations, he said.

The lawsuit comes 10 days after Cox filed criminal charges against eight former employees of the Metron Big Rapids nursing home in connection with the death of a resident.

Sarah Comer, 50, died there in January 2005 after her oxygen tank ran empty.

Cox charged some of the home's employees with negligence for not preventing her death. Others were charged with covering up the cause of death, including Hart physician Rudy Ochs, the nursing home's medical director. Ochs also is the Oceana County medical examiner.

Metron Integrated Health Systems operates nine nursing homes in West Michigan and provides home health care, medical equipment and hospice care. Company officials repeatedly have refused to comment.

The state Department of Community Health's annual inspection of Metron's Big Rapids home found 27 violations in 2004 and 12 in 2005. The Allegan home was cited for six violations in 2004 and 21 in 2005. The Kalamazoo home was cited for eight violations in 2004 and 15 in 2005. On average, state investigators found nine violations in Michigan's nursing homes in 2005. Cox said he would not rule out filing similar suits against other nursing homes, although he said no suits are in the works.

Michigan Report

March 8, 2006

## **SENATE PASSES HOUSE VERSION OF GROUP HOME RULES**

The House version of legislation blocking the state from adopting rules that critics charge could favor unionized nursing and group care homes won Senate approval Wednesday on straight party-line votes.

The Senate passed HB 5744 and HB 5745 on 21-15 votes and failed to give the measures immediate effect. The bills are identical to SB 1029 and SB 1030, which passed the chamber last month.

Republicans argue the bills are needed to prevent the possibility of the administration of Governor Jennifer Granholm adopting rules that could subject nursing and group care homes to more regulations if they are not unionized.

But Democrats argued the bills are “solutions in search of a problem” because any possible rules are still being studied by the administration. Sen. Ray Basham (D-Taylor) said if group home workers are paid an adequate wage then the homes would not have to worry about unions forming.

## Michigan Report

March 8, 2006

# JANUARY JOBLESS RATE FALLS

Michigan's seasonally adjusted jobless rate in January fell to 6.2 percent from December's 6.7 percent, figures released Wednesday from the Department of Labor and Economic Growth showed.

There was some decline in the total labor force during the month, the figures showed, but the number of people working increased by 23,000 during the month.

The 6.2 percent rate compared to a January 2005 seasonally adjusted jobless rate of 7 percent.

The state typically engages in benchmarking labor data at the beginning of the year, which delays the release of the first unemployment report.

In a press release, Rick Waclawek, director of the Bureau of Labor Market Information and Strategic Initiatives, said Michigan's labor market trends over the past year have been stable, with a modest reduction in joblessness.

January's seasonally adjusted rate was the 10<sup>th</sup> consecutive month that unemployment been below 7 percent, and it was the lowest rate the state had recorded since September 2002 when the rate stood at 6.1 percent. The state still lingers in worse shape than the national average, where the rate for January had dropped by .2 percentage point to 4.7 percent.

Seasonally adjusted figures showed a total labor force in Michigan for January of 5.105 million, down 1,000 from December, but up 16,000 from January 2005.

The total number of people employed in January was 4.787 million, up 23,000 from December and up 55,000 from January 2005. Total unemployment of 318,000 was down by 24,000 from December.

The news was mixed, though. The Detroit-Warren-Livonia labor market saw a loss of 20,000 people from the labor force and a corresponding 10,000-person drop in the number of people employed and 9,000 in the number of unemployed.

And the department showed a number of jobs losses in a number of industries, including construction which had seen job growth overall during the year.

## **Jobless Percent Down, State Economy Shrinking**

January brought both good and bad economic news to Michigan according to the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth (DLEG), which today reported both the state's jobless rate as determined by the household survey, and the state's payroll employment as determined by the business survey, decreased.

The two reports showed the state's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate fell by one-half of one percent, during a month when Michigan shed 29,000 non-farm payroll jobs.

Recall that the state's jobless rate is determined by a survey of households. A survey of business establishments is generally used by economists to measure the direction and velocity of the state's economy (See, "So What Gives With The Numbers?," 1/26/06).

The January jobless rate of 6.2 percent is down from the 6.7 percent jobless number the agency reported for December of last year. In the state's labor force, total employment grew by 23,000 and unemployment declined by 24,000.

Compared to a year ago, January's jobless rate is eight-tenths of a percent below the seven percent pegged in January of 2005. In the same period, the national jobless rate decreased by five-tenths of one percent.

"Michigan's labor market situation was mixed in January," said Rick **WACLAWEK**, director of DLEG's Bureau of Market Information and Strategic Initiatives. "A significant unemployment rate decline was coupled with sizeable job



cutbacks in a number of major industry sectors. This state's labor market trends over the past year have been stable, with a modest reduction in the jobless rate."

The bad news issued by the state today is that the report showed the monthly survey of employers, the figure most economists use to measure economic growth, showed payroll jobs dropped by 29,000 in January to 4,638,000. Job losses were widespread throughout most industry sectors over the month.

According to the state, the largest declines were recorded in trade, transportation and utilities (-10,000), manufacturing (-6,000) and leisure and hospitality services (-5,000). Other noteworthy decreases occurred in construction (-4,000) and in professional and business services (-3,000).

## **DLEG To Roll Out New Job Training Program**

The Department of Labor and Economic Growth (DLEG), in partnership with the Department of Human Services (DHS), is about to launch a new Jobs, Education, and Training (JET) pilot program for Work First in four Michigan counties.

DLEG Interim Director Bob **SWANSON** today told members of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Economic Development the 18-month program, designed to improve long term employability of welfare recipients, is scheduled to get underway next month in Sanilac, Oakland, Kent and Wayne counties.

The Granholm administration has requested \$1.1 million in the 2007 DLEG budget for the program's operation.

Committee Chair Jack **BRANDENBURG** (R-Harrison Twp.) wanted to know how the four counties were selected and whether unemployment rates were taken into consideration.

Janet **HOWARD**, of DLEG's Bureau of Workforce Programs, responded that the Department of Human Services selected the four counties based on unemployment, economy and the desire to have "very urban and very rural counties" represented.

Swanson said the focus of the program will be to do an initial assessment test on applicants to determine what their barriers to employment really are and move them into programs to eliminate those barriers prior to providing job skill training designed to help them retain a job and move up the career ladder.

One of the goals is to at least raise the reading and math skills of ten percent of the participants to an eighth grade level.

Swanson also told the committee that new requirements in the recently reauthorized federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program could cost the state over \$108 million in block grant losses and penalties because the new work participation requirements cannot be met

by the current Work First program.

The total required increase in state spending for failure to meet the TANF 50-percent work participation rates could amount to as much as \$70 million in addition to a TANF block grant reduction of \$38.8 million.

The administration has added boilerplate language in the 2007 budget to provide the department with more flexibility in an effort to meet the new requirements. The language adds education, community service, and volunteerism options for welfare recipients to satisfy work requirements. It also requires screening applicants to determine barriers to employment prior to referral to Work First Program; increase allowable period for training and education from 12 months to 36 months and time allowed for a General Education Diploma completion from six months to 12 months; and requires Work First participants assessed at or below 9th grade reading and math skills to participate in a remedial program.

Rep. David **FARHAT** (R-Muskegon) questioned what additional cost would be involved to expand the education program completion requirement beyond six months.

"We don't have a cost figure," Howard responded.

"If it meets the federal criteria, can we draw additional TANF money?" Farhat asked.

"No," was Howard's answer.

"Then we will just delete the pool of applicants for six months?" Farhat queried.

Howard said the program would provide additional training rather than having applicants repeat the process, which in the long run would save money.

Swanson provided the Committee with an overview of the proposed Workforce Development Programs budget contained in the administration's proposed 2007 DLEG budget.

The proposed Workforce Development Programs budget is \$552.4 million of which only \$42.3 million is GF/GP. The overall proposed DLEG budget is \$1.22 billion, which represents a 2.8 percent increase over the current year.

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March 8, 2006

## **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS WORKING TOWARD PERMANENCE**

The Department of Labor and Economic Growth is hoping that the \$552.4 million proposed for workforce development programs for the coming fiscal year will help more residents find permanent work or even careers, DLEG Interim Director Bob Swanson told the House Appropriations Economic Development Subcommittee.

"Our vision with regard to workers is to provide the education and training they need to secure good paying jobs," Mr. Swanson said at a hearing Wednesday. "We want to be able to help people not only get jobs but to keep them longer and move up the career ladder."

Most of the workforce funds are federal, with most of the \$42.3 million in general fund needed as matching funds for the federal grants, Mr. Swanson said.

But Mr. Swanson said some of those federal funds could be in jeopardy without some changes in the state's Work First Program. The proposed budget includes more opportunity for recipients to use education toward the time they are expected to be working.

In prior years, the state had built up caseload reduction credits that allowed it to fall below the federal requirement that half of Work First eligible families have at least one adult working. But Mr. Swanson said those credits were erased as part of the reauthorization of the federal act, so the state must now fully comply with the requirement.

He said the state has room to allow more education as a qualifying activity. "We have 2.2 percent participation in training. Wisconsin has 20 percent," he said, adding that the federal limit is 30 percent.

Subcommittee members also focused on the Jobs, Education and Training Program, for which four pilot sites will begin operation yet this spring. The goal of the program, operating jointly with the Department of Human Services, is to focus more closely on the barriers to work for those in the pilot regions.

Mr. Swanson said the four regions had all volunteered to participate in the pilots, which will involve a more stringent intake process to better target the families' needs.

And the department is proposing to continue the Michigan Opportunity Partnership Program. The effort to match employers with those seeking work and providing prospective employees accelerated training to prepare them for the jobs available is hoped to put 40,000 to work by May 2007. The goal for the current year is 30,000 by May 2006.

Mr. Swanson said DLEG and DHS are also working on new application processes that would allow the departments to better share information and reduce the amount of duplicative paperwork applicants have to fill out.

Mar 9, 12:53 PM EST

## **Michigan Senate moves to increase minimum wage**

By DAVID EGGERT  
Associated Press Writer

LANSING, Mich. (AP) -- Michigan workers making the state's minimum wage would get a raise of \$1.80 an hour later this year under legislation passed unanimously Thursday by the state Senate.

The minimum wage is now \$5.15 an hour. Under the Senate-approved bill, the wage would go to \$6.95 in October and gradually increase to \$7.40 an hour by July 2008. Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema, R-Wyoming, noted that the state has not had a raise in the minimum wage in nine years. He said there are positives and negatives for raising the wage.

"But all in all, I think it's the right thing to do at the right time," Sikkema said Thursday on the Senate floor.

The surprise vote is a response to a petition drive to raise the minimum wage in the state constitution. Democrats pushing the ballot measure had hoped it would bring more Democrats to the polls in November, something Republicans would like to avoid.

"It's a factor in the decision making - there's no question about it," Sikkema said of the petition drive.

The Senate-approved bill initially would raise the wage more than the petition drive would, but it would not put the language in the state constitution, meaning the increase could be repealed in the future. If voters approved raising the minimum wage in the state constitution, it would take another statewide vote to repeal the increase.

The bill doesn't link the minimum wage to inflationary increases, something the ballot measure would do. Republicans criticized that tie, and Sikkema said that was one reason he decided to move the bill.

Michigan's \$5.15-per-hour minimum wage is the same as the federal government's. Seventeen states and the District of Columbia have higher minimum wages.

The bill now goes to the Republican-controlled House, where it was not expected to be taken up Thursday.

The Senate vote drew a mixed response from interest groups.

The Michigan Restaurant Association said raising the minimum wage would kill jobs but added that it's better to do it with legislation than by amending the constitution.

The Michigan Catholic Conference applauded the Senate vote.

"Work is more than just a job, it is a reflection of our human dignity and a way to contribute to the common good," Paul Long, the group's vice president for public policy, said in a statement.

Senate Democrats first introduced the bill to increase the minimum wage in March 2005, but their efforts to raise wages were largely ignored by Republicans who control the chamber.

The minimum wage bill is Senate Bill 318.

## **Housing grant sought**

### ***County seeks funds for emergency home repair***

By Marcie Westover  
Sturgis Journal

CENTREVILLE — St. Joseph County will pursue a \$275,000 grant to help with rehabilitation and emergency home repair for low-income people and families.

The county's 2006 Housing Resource Fund application was approved by the board of commissioners after a public hearing on Tuesday.

The Community Action Agency is acting as a third-party administrator for the two-year grant from the Michigan State Housing Development Authority.

This is the first year the CAA has administered the funds. Previously the city of Three Rivers acted as the third party administrator.

In the grant \$185,200 is outlined to be used for major home rehabilitations.

To ensure funds were available to address emergency repairs, the grant application also outlines \$35,000 for this area.

Nearly 20 percent of the grant will be used for administrative expenses. The CAA will have four or five people working on this process.

With only one person administering the previous grant, there was around \$60,000 still available on its expiration date. St. Joseph County was able to obtain an extension in order to fully use these funds.

Once the grant is secured, those who are interested in applying for grant funding would have go to the CAA. To participate in the grant process, applicants need proof of income, home ownership, up-to-date taxes, and homeowners insurance.

MSHDA income guidelines are used in the selection process.

The repairs are made to HQS Section 8 including items like plumbing, electrical, roofing, or even fixing steps.

There is also a lead inspection done, with up to \$10,000 in repairs allowed. In addition to this, \$25,000 is available for the rehabilitation of the home. A potential of \$35,000 could be put into one project.

An applicant can apply for up to \$2,500 to fix emergency problems.

For information about the program call CAA at 467-8563 or visit their location at 1000 E. Broadway in Three Rivers.

# New York Asks Help From Poor in Housing

By JANNY SCOTT  
The New York Times

Published: March 9, 2006

The New York City Housing Authority, landlord to more than 400,000 poor New Yorkers, is facing a budget shortfall of \$168 million and has proposed narrowing the gap by charging residents new fees and increasing old ones for everything from owning a dishwasher to getting a toilet unclogged.

The authority says its operating deficit stems from enormous increases in energy and pension costs while its federal financing for public housing has been cut. Since 2001, the agency says, it has spent \$357 million from its reserves to close repeated budget gaps; this year, for the first time, it no longer has enough reserves to cover the shortfall.

So it has proposed charging tenants \$5.75 a month to run a washing machine, \$5 a month to operate a dishwasher, \$10 a month for a separate freezer. Parking fees will rise to \$75 from \$5 a year on April 1.

The authority plans to raise existing fees for dozens of services, like fixing damage to apartments beyond normal wear and tear, and to charge, for the first time, for things like rescuing lost keys from elevator pits after hours. The authority would like to put the fee changes other than for parking into effect around May 1.

The Housing Authority board has asked its senior staff to come up with a plan to balance the budget while preserving basic services, minimizing the impact on the most vulnerable residents and finding what the board called "creative ways to streamline service delivery." The authority has also appealed to federal and city officials for help.

"The chickens are coming home to roost," said Representative Jerrold L. Nadler of Manhattan, who added that the federal government was taking less responsibility for public housing. "The Housing Authority has, by one ingenious means or another, been holding it together with spit and baling wire. This could be really devastating."

Continuing cost cuts are likely to have a profound effect around the country, with the nation's 1.2 million units of public housing in danger of deteriorating, housing experts fear.

New York's Housing Authority, the largest in the country, operates 345 developments around the city, including nearly 2,700 buildings and 181,000 apartments. Half of its operating income comes from its federal subsidy; most of the rest comes from rent from its tenants, whose average household income is less than \$19,000 a year.

Arlyne Allen, who lives in the Amsterdam Houses on the West Side of Manhattan with her husband and three teenage children and provides day care out of her home, said of the fees: "It'll affect me a lot. You can't even afford what you have now." If she could, she said, she would move to Pennsylvania to find private housing that she could afford.

According to the agency, expenses have skyrocketed. Contributions to its employees' pension fund increased by 866 percent, to \$62.6 million, between 2001 and 2005, in part because of market fluctuations and new state laws, a problem faced by scores of government agencies. Further, utility costs rose by 45 percent, health care costs by 42 percent and workers' compensation by 39 percent.

At the same time, authority officials say, the federal operating subsidy for public housing nationwide has remained flat, and the authority's federal operating subsidy has shrunk by \$14 million. The agency is also responsible for 21,000 apartments formerly subsidized by the city and the state that no longer get any subsidy.

As a result, the authority has faced budget shortfalls every year since 2001. The total gap for 2006 is \$182 million, which the agency says it has whittled down to \$168 million through measures including proposed staff reductions, consolidation of functions and elimination of vacant positions.

Under federal rules, the authority is required to maintain a minimum of about two months' worth of operating expenses, or about \$270 million, to weather changes in appropriation levels or delays in financing. In recent years, that reserve has dropped to \$320 million from more than \$800 million, officials said.

"It's big, it's really big," Howard Marder, a spokesman for the authority, said of the shortfall that the agency can no longer cover. "It's never been like this."

The tenant fees are expected to generate about \$1.5 million in revenue. The authority says most of the "utility surcharges" on appliances have long been in place and have not risen in more than a decade.

Tenants say few fees were ever imposed. "Only in extreme cases where a door was bullet riddled or somebody kicked the front entrance door and it was not based on wear and tear," said Gerri Lamb, the citywide chairwoman of the Resident Council of Presidents, a tenant group. "And certainly not this amount of money. I've been in public housing over 35 years and there's never been a set listing of charges that was given to the residents."

Saul Ramirez, executive director of the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials, traced the budget shortfall to "a steady disinvestment" in public housing at the federal level. "Obviously," he said, "there has been a decline that has gotten to a critical point in the area of operations."



Michigan Report

March 8, 2006

## **PANEL REPORTS HUMAN TRAFFICKING BILLS**

Legislation that would amend the Michigan Penal Code to include human trafficking as a felony crime won unanimous recommendation by the House Judiciary Committee on Wednesday.

HB 5747 would add the new charge to the code and HB 5748 would provide sentencing guidelines. Human trafficking would include forcing a person into providing labor or services, or “modern-day slavery,” said one of the package’s sponsor Rep. Phil Pavlov (R-St. Clair). Each violation of that law would be punishable for up to 10 years in prison. If the violation caused a person injury, the jail time would consist of up to 15 years and if there is a death involved, the person would be sentenced to life or any term of years.

In cases of human trafficking involving child sexual abuse, a person could be imprisoned up to 20 years and for kidnapping, criminal sexual conduct and attempt to kill related to human trafficking a violator could face life behind bars or any term of years.

The legislation also calls for the attorney general and Department of Human Services to carry out an annual report accounting for how the laws and social programs have responded to the needs of human trafficking victims and what areas could be improved upon.

Oakland County Prosecutor David Gorcyca testified in support of the legislation, saying that there was a case where a girl was smuggled into the country thinking she was being brought over to be educated, but instead was forced to take care of a family’s three children, cook and clean. The toolbox of charges available for this type of situation is limited, he said, but the legislation would improve upon that.

The panel also reported out unanimously HB 5823 and HB 5824, which would allow forfeited monies seized under the Michigan Penal Code and Public Health Code to be deposited into an interest-bearing account after the attorney for the person whose property was seized had a 60-day waiting period. If a person was found guilty of a crime, the money would go to state and local governments, however, if that person was determined to be not guilty, then the money and interest it earned would be given back to the person.

**MIRS**  
**March 8, 2006**

## **Panel Moves Bills On Prosecuting Human Trafficking**

Today, the House Judiciary Committee unanimously passed HB 5747, legislation that would amend the Michigan Penal Code to add a new chapter, Chapter 57A, dealing with human trafficking.

"People being smuggled in (to the U.S.) often times lead to human trafficking," said Phil **PAVLOV** (R-St. Clair), the sponsor of HB 5747. "Often the human trafficking ultimately leads to victims being put into slavery, sometimes involving prostitution and pornography."

Pavlov said the federal government wants states to put laws on the books that will allow local prosecutors to deal more effectively with these cases of human trafficking.

Oakland County Prosecutor David **GORCYCA** told the Committee about a case that played out in his jurisdiction.

The case involved a young girl who was brought to the United States, on a forged passport, after her family in Cameroon had been promised that she'd receive an education and have a better life in the U.S.

"They (her false U.S. host parents) forced her to live in a basement bedroom with no hot water," Gorcyca said. "Her primary function was to clean, cook and care for the couple's children. Ultimately, she was sexually abused by the (false) father and physically abused by both the (false) father and mother."

Gorcyca said that the (false) parents told the girl that if she reported anything to the authorities she'd be in trouble because she'd entered the country illegally.

According to Gorcyca, there were few options for prosecuting the man and woman because local and state laws really don't address the situation.

"The jury had trouble with the kidnapping charge because we had to prove forceful confinement and they didn't have her tied up or chained," Gorcyca said.

The legislation covers a variety of scenarios that address as many aspects of human trafficking as possible.

### 3 face food stamp charges

Detroit Free Press

March 9, 2006

Two Detroit party-store owners and a manager were charged in criminal complaints with defrauding the federal food stamp program of an estimated \$1.5 million since 2004.

Charged were Dicra Zia, 36, owner of Express Lanes Party Store, 12546 Dexter; Express Lanes store manager Latif Barash, 39, and Monassar Alarosi, 40, owner of Holiday Party Store, 8201 Joy Road.

Police said the men let a federal informant use food stamp debit cards at the stores. Instead of food, they allegedly gave him half of the dollar amount charged and pocketed the rest.

Zia and Barash were released on \$10,000 unsecured bonds after appearances Wednesday in U.S. District Court in Detroit. Alarosi was held overnight.

Their court-appointed lawyer, Deputy Federal Defender James Gerometta, said he couldn't comment.

*By David Ashenfelter*

March 8, 2006

## **HOUSE PANEL APPROVES ENERGY ASSISTANCE**

More people would qualify for assistance with their energy bills and money for that assistance would come from a combination of state oil lease revenue and an income tax checkoff under bills approved Wednesday by the House Energy and Technology Committee.

The package moved despite concerns from Treasury officials that more recipients of the Home Heating Tax Credit would mean smaller credits and that there was not a system in place to handle the proposed checkoff.

The package would provide the heating credit to those earning under 125 percent of poverty for the current tax year ([HB 5689](#)) and for those earning 130 percent beginning January 1, 2007 ([HB 5690](#)). Those qualifying for other state assistance programs also could take a 10 percent credit for the cost of purchasing and installing energy efficient appliances ([HB 5691](#)).

The credits would be covered first by federal Low-Income Heat and Energy Assistance Program funds. And part of the package is a resolution ([HR 182](#)) calling on Congress to appropriate more money for that program. The U.S. Senate approved legislation Wednesday that would increase LIHEAP funding by \$29 million.

Any additional funds would come from a new Home Heating Credit Fund. Money for the fund would come from \$6 million of the first \$66 million in oil and gas severance tax payments ([HB 5686](#)) and from a new income tax form checkoff ([HB 5837](#)).

[Rep. Frank Accavitti](#) (D-Eastpointe) said he expected, based on the performance of prior income tax checkoffs, that the new checkoff would bring in about \$500,000 a year. The checkoff would add \$5 to an individual's tax liability (or take \$5 from a refund) to deposit into the fund.

The checkoff was also the only of the package opposed by the Department of Treasury. Scott Schrager with the department said Treasury is still working on a system that will automate checkoffs without adding to the error rate on returns.

"The more lines you have, the more errors there's going to be," he said.

He also questioned how many checkoff programs the state wants to operate. "Right now everybody has a pet project. How many of these should there be?" he said.

“As many as it takes,” replied Rep. John Garfield (R-Rochester Hills), one of several members who questioned how difficult it should be for the department to develop a system to handle checkoffs.

“With all due respect, it’s not minor and it’s not simple,” Mr. Schrager said.

And, while the department did not oppose expanding eligibility for the tax credit, Mr. Schrager noted that increasing eligibility for the credit to 125 percent of poverty would mean cutting credits to those who already receive them by 17 percent. Increasing the threshold to 130 percent would mean cuts of more than 20 percent in individual credits, he said.

The department also did not oppose the appliance tax credit. Mr. Schrager said that plan would cost the state at most \$1.5 million. He had raised more concerns about an earlier proposal that would have provided a 100 percent credit for any purchase of an energy efficient appliance.

But he did continue concerns over use of the severance tax. While Treasury is not opposing the plan, Mr. Schrager said it is not a stable source of funding for a program such as the tax credit.



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM  
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN  
MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES  
LANSING



MARIANNE UDOW  
DIRECTOR

## News Release

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### Udow one of six honored as women leaders in the workplace

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March 9, 2006

**LIVONIA - The Michigan Business and Professional Association (MBPA) honored Michigan Department of Human Services director Marianne Udow and five other women leaders at its annual conference and awards luncheon today in Livonia.** Udow, who has been director of the Department of Human Services since January 2004, was nominated by MBPA in the human services category.

The mission of the "Women & Leadership in the Workplace" conference is to provide education, encourage leadership, promote high professional standards and assure equal advantages for women who have demonstrated excellence in their professions, occupations, places of employment and in volunteerism. Others being honored at the event include:

- Anne Stevens, executive vice president, Ford Motor Company and chief operating officer, The Americas.
- Gail Torreano, president of AT&T Michigan.
- Carmen Harlan, co-anchor of WDIV's Local 4 News in Detroit.
- Sherry Ann Washington, founder of Sherry Washington Gallery and the BWW Group, Inc.
- Rosa Parks, civil rights activist, who will be honored posthumously.

The conference and awards luncheon was held today at the Burton Manor in Livonia. More than 700 women were expected to attend the event. The conference offered workshops on financial issues, mentoring, and networking ideas for women. Governor Jennifer Granholm presented the keynote address.

"This is our tenth anniversary honoring the most talented women in Michigan," said MBPA president Ed Deeb. "We have honored many highly accomplished women and this year is no exception."

Warren, Mich.-based Michigan Business & Professional Association represents more than 20,000 small to medium-sized businesses in Michigan that employ over 160,000 persons. The MBPA is a sister association to the Michigan Food & Beverage Association (MFBA). Contact Sue Voyles (734) 667-2005 or Ed Deeb (586) 393-8800 for more information about the association.

See Marianne Udow's bio online at [http://www.michigan.gov/dhs/0,1607,7-124-5459\\_7097---,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/dhs/0,1607,7-124-5459_7097---,00.html) or go to [www.michigan.gov](http://www.michigan.gov), click on "Inside DHS" and "Meet the Director"